

Israel's bombing of Syria escalates threat of wider war

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Wednesday's bombing of a Syrian military site by Israeli warplanes has ratcheted up the danger that the Western-backed civil war in Syria will spill over into a broader regional conflagration.

Unnamed US officials cited by the *New York Times* claimed that the target of Wednesday's dawn air strike was a military convoy carrying arms that were supposedly destined for Hezbollah, the Shia political movement and militia in Lebanon.

The Syrian government, however, said that air strikes were directed against a military research center in Jamraya, in the Qasioun mountain range about three miles west of Damascus. It said that two workers at the center were killed in the bombing and five others were wounded.

"Israeli warplanes violated our airspace at dawn today and directly struck one of the scientific research centers responsible for elevating the resistance and self-defense capabilities in the area of Jamraya in the Damascus countryside," Syria's military said in a statement published by the official Sana news agency.

The Syrian regime charged that the air strikes had been facilitated by coordinated attacks on the part of the US-and Western-backed "rebels" against the country's radar networks and air defense systems.

"Late Wednesday, a US official said the accounts of two targets—a convoy of weapons and a military site—weren't mutually exclusive," the *Wall Street Journal* reported. The official suggested that the convoy was attacked inside the military facility. How Israel determined that it was carrying weapons bound for Hezbollah across the border in Lebanon has not been clarified.

For its part, the Israeli regime has maintained a complete silence on its act of aggression against Syria. The *New York Times* late Thursday described this

silence as "part of a longstanding strategy to give targeted countries face-saving opportunities to avoid conflict escalation."

According to this perverse reasoning, Syria's public statement on the attack—rather than the attack itself—was responsible for "increasing the likelihood of a cycle of retaliation."

The air strike was reportedly carried out by four Israeli warplanes that flew low over Syrian territory before firing as many as a dozen missiles into the complex.

The Lebanese *Daily Star* quoted residents of the Jamraya area who said that they were woken by blasts at the military site. "We were sleeping. Then we started hearing rockets hitting the complex and the ground started shaking and we ran into the basement," a woman who lives next to the complex told the Lebanese newspaper.

Another Syrian, who has a relative working inside the military site, told Reuters: "It appears that there were about a dozen rockets that appeared to hit one building in the complex. The facility is closed today."

The extreme right-wing government of Israeli President Benjamin Netanyahu has claimed that it fears the nearly two-year-old civil war in Syria will lead to advanced weapons falling into the hands of Hezbollah or the Western-backed Islamist militias. In reality, as it begins its third term in office, the Netanyahu government is exploiting the crisis in Syria to carry out military strikes aimed at weakening its potential adversaries and paving the way for a new eruption of open warfare.

According to US officials, the alleged convoy headed to Lebanon was not carrying chemical weapons or any other offensive arms, but rather Russian-made SA-17 anti-aircraft missiles, which would be capable of hitting

Israeli fighter-bombers, helicopters and drones.

As NBC News put it, “They would remove Israel’s critical freedom of flight over Lebanon.” The Israeli regime has exercised this “freedom” repeatedly in the last several days. On Wednesday, the Lebanese army reported that Israeli warplanes had carried out two sorties over Lebanese territory, circling for hours on Tuesday and returning before dawn on Wednesday.

More importantly, this unchallenged control over Lebanon’s airspace is critical for Israel if it is preparing yet another war against the country to its north, which it last invaded in 2006, destroying much of its infrastructure with air and sea bombardments and killing over 1,100 people.

This eventuality was strongly suggested by a top Israeli military commander. On the eve of the air strike on Syria, Major-General Amir Eshel, the chief of Israel’s air force, declared that Israel was now engaged in a “war between wars” and that “this campaign is 24/7, 365 days a year. We are taking action to reduce the immediate threats, to create better conditions in which we will be able to win the wars, when they happen.”

Eshel said that Tel Aviv was trying “to keep [our] efforts beneath the level at which war breaks out,” but added, “... if there is no alternative—maybe it will.”

The Israeli attack was carried out after prior consultation with the Obama administration in Washington, which, like Tel Aviv, has maintained a guilty silence over the air strikes. Indeed, the only official US response came in the form of a statement by the White House deputy national security advisor, Ben Rhodes, who issued a warning to Syria that it should not “further destabilize the region by transferring weaponry to Hezbollah.”

Israel’s carrying out a so-called “preventive” military action, i.e., unprovoked aggression, against a sovereign territory was clearly not seen by the US administration as “destabilizing.” This was just the latest in a long line of such criminal actions, carried out by Washington’s ally, including last October’s attack on an alleged weapons factory in Sudan and endless violence against the Palestinian populations in the occupied territories of the Gaza Strip and West Bank.

The Israeli air strikes were condemned by the Russian government, which called them “unprovoked attacks on targets on the territory of a sovereign country, which

blatantly violates the UN Charter and is unacceptable, no matter the motives to justify it.”

Iran, Syria’s closest regional ally, warned that the “Zionist regime’s attack on the outskirts of Damascus will have grave consequences for Tel Aviv.” Previously Tehran had warned that it would treat an attack on Syria as an act of aggression against its own territory.

In Lebanon, President Michel Suleiman denounced the Israeli attack as “flagrant aggression” and accused Israel of “exploiting the developments in Syria to carry out its aggressive policies, indifferent to all the humanitarian and international treaties.”

Debka.com, an Israeli military intelligence web site with close ties to the Israeli secret services, reported that the strike on Syria had “touched off high military alerts across the region,” including on the part of a Russian fleet of 18 warships in the eastern Mediterranean, the Lebanese and Jordanian armies and US forces based at the Incerlik air base in Turkey, as well as US special operations troops deployed in Jordan.

The US-backed Israeli attack on Syria is only the beginning of what threatens to explode into a far wider war, including against Iran, dragging the entire region into a bloodbath and endangering the lives of millions.



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